



JGA Presidents Alert  
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### **Will Day of Giving Campaigns Address Ailing Alumni Giving?**

*Review of recent campaigns and tip sheet for those planning a campaign*

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Over the past few decades, we have noted and become concerned about the consistent decline in alumni giving rates – watching them drop by 50% in just over 20 years, falling from 18% in 1990 to 8.7% in 2013 according to the data for public and private institutions from the 2013 Voluntary Support of Education report.

Does this portend a permanent and potentially crippling lessening of support for higher education? What does it mean if only rarely do alumni believe that their alma mater deserves financial support? The trend is worrying. Understanding that there are likely multiple reasons for this decline, it is still encouraging when we can see a new method to re-engage a subset of the alumni constituent base.

It is interesting to observe the success of recent Day of Giving initiatives in the last few years and consider if they provide a new and effective means of engaging and involving alumni, particularly younger alumni who are an important segment for the future.

The popular campaigns focus on one day of giving that amplifies an institution's fundraising efforts through social media. Legions of volunteers, along with staff push out the campaign message asking for support from alumni to reach challenge goals throughout the day. These one-day events cause alumni to think about and – in many cases – support their colleges. They create some excitement and group spirit which help to spur reengagement.

While there are certainly questions remaining about the retention of the new donors gathered through the excitement and publicity surrounding Day of Giving campaigns, they do appear to be doing a good job of grabbing the attention and participation of alumni. We know, for example, that it is more likely we can continue to have alums engaged if we can get them engaged in a positive way at least once.

Day of Giving campaigns are meeting young alumni “where they are” and bringing many of them into contact with their alma mater for the first time since graduation. Still the question remains what will happen in two to three years with or without efforts to sustain that contact?

We have seen enough examples of Day of Giving campaigns being successful that we wanted to share with you some of our observations.

Recent experiences at Illinois Wesleyan University and Wabash College – among many institutions - show there might be techniques to employ to transform Day of Giving initiatives into sustainable, meaningful contact with new donors.

Successful institutions have been able to:

- Elevate the discussion of alumni and giving strategies to senior leadership and administration;
- Receive a refresher course on what their constituents care about and shape that into their messaging and strategy;
- Resist the urge to treat the activity as just a new, trendy social media push; and
- Promote engagement and unity of message among their constituents.

“This was an excellent way to get leadership engaged,” explained Ted Grossnickle, Senior Consultant and Founder of JGA who is also a Trustee at Wabash College. “There was a ripple effect with the Day of Giving campaign in that it got everyone talking about the school.”

While the enthusiasm for Day of Giving campaigns cuts across all age groups of alumni, younger alums in particular are getting engaged and excited. Specifically younger donors, some question whether these initiatives will always engender increased giving from Millennials even as they age. We simply don't have research yet that shows that.

Their behavior might change, but we can't deny that Day of Giving campaigns give us a new avenue to connect with these disengaged constituents and the enthusiasm for the campaign and the institution spreads and multiplies many times over.

**If you are preparing for or have just completed a Day of Giving campaign, we have compiled a [tip sheet](#) with observations and insights from examples of other campaigns. We'd also like to share what we have observed to be key ingredients to a successful Day of Giving Campaign posted in a recent [blog post](#) on our website.**

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